

France bans wild animals in circuses

November 18 2021, by Anne Pascale Reboul



Consigned to history: The new law will ban use of lions such as these of the Amar Circus in 1946 Paris.

French lawmakers voted on Thursday to end wild animals being used in live circus shows, spelling an end to performing tigers, lions or bears.

Performances of wild [animals](#) will be prohibited in two years and owning them outlawed in seven years, under the wide-ranging animal rights legislation that has been under debate since 2020.

The law, once signed by President Emmanuel Macron, will also ban live dolphin shows in the next five years and immediately end mink farming, meaning the country's last operator will close.

Macron's centrist Republic on the Move (LREM) party called the legislation "a historic step in the animal rights combat".

Circus owners denounced it, while some environmentalists said it did not go far enough.

The foundation of France's most famous animal advocate, veteran actress Brigitte Bardot, welcomed "a major advance for the [animal rights](#) cause in France".

As well as the measures targeting circuses, the new law will raise the maximum penalty for mistreating animals to up to five years in prison and a fine of 75,000 euros (\$85,000), and will tighten restrictions on the sale of pets.

Loïc Dombreval, the LREM co-sponsor of the law, conceded that other controversial issues had not been included within the scope of the legislation, which won cross-party support in both houses of parliament.

"There will inevitably come a day when... we will debate sensitive issues such as hunting, such as bull-fighting, or some animal-rearing practices," said the lawmaker, who is also a veterinarian.

'Arbitrary law'

Environmentalists had called for measures to improve the conditions inside industrialised animal farms, which will require "a change in our agricultural model", Senator Daniel Salmon said on Thursday.

Issues such as hunting and bull-fighting are especially sensitive because they are staunchly defended by supporters in [rural areas](#) as long-standing cultural practices.

Farms that make foie gras pate in France—which force-feed birds such as geese and ducks to artificially bloat their livers—have also long been targeted by campaigners.

The 120 circus owners in France are likely to protest against the restrictions placed on their livelihoods and have warned that some animals might end up abandoned.

"It's an arbitrary law because there are not mistreated animals in our circuses," William Kerwich, head of the circus animal trainers' union, told AFP.

He said there would be a reaction from his members on Monday, and a legal appeal.

The new legislation also bans the use of [wild animals](#) in [television shows](#), nightclubs and private parties.

Polls show that a vast majority of French people support the law, and dozens of cities and towns around the country have already banned travelling circuses that use animals.

The changes will bring France into step with more than 20 European countries that have either banned or heavily restricted the use of animals for entertainment.

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